CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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LETTER DATED 14 NOVEMBER 2000 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE TRANSMITTING THE TEXT OF A STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, MR VLADIMIR V. PUTIN, DATED 13 NOVEMBER 2000, CONVEYING NEW INITIATIVES IN THE FIELD OF THE REDUCTION AND LIMITATION OF STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE ARMS (START) AND THE LIMITATION OF ANTI-BALLISTIC MISSILE SYSTEMS (ABM)

I have the honour to transmit the text of a statement made on 13 November 2000 by the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir V. Putin, conveying new initiatives in the field of the reduction and limitation of strategic offensive arms (START) and the limitation of anti-ballistic missile systems (ABM).

I should be grateful if the statement could be issued as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament and distributed to the delegations of all member States of the Conference and non-member States participating in its work.

(Signed): Vasily SIDOROV
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
Head of delegation of the
Russian Federation to the
Conference on Disarmament

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Statement by the President of the Russian Federation

At the turn of the millennium, the world has come to a critical juncture in nuclear disarmament, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and guarantees for strategic stability. Unquestionable progress has recently been made in this area: highly responsible decisions were taken at the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, a wide-ranging dialogue on disarmament questions was held at the Millennium Summit in New York, and the First Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a number of important resolutions. The Russian Federation also made its contribution, ratifying the Treaty on Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (START II), a package of anti-missile defence agreements concluded in New York in 1997, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. A consensus has been reached by the international community: there should be no lull in nuclear disarmament, and the disarmament process should be intensified. There is a real need for substantial progress in this area.

The Russian Federation is ready for this.

We do not see any reason that would prevent further deep reductions in strategic offensive arms. As is well known, we have proposed to the United States of America, including at the highest level, that our goal should be a substantial reduction of the levels of nuclear weapons in our countries to 1,500 units, the completion of which is entirely possible by 2008. But this is not all: we are ready to consider even lower levels at a later time. We agree with the view, which has also been expressed in the United States, that in order to reach such an agreement there is no need to hold drawn-out negotiations and start the whole process from scratch; we already have considerable experience, and there are the treaty mechanisms under START I and START II. We hope that the United States Senate will follow the example of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and complete the ratification of START II and agreements in the field of anti-missile defence. But the main thing now is for the Russian Federation and the United States to begin without delay to take joint and parallel measures to achieve radically lower ceilings for nuclear warheads.

This goal should be achieved while preserving and strengthening the 1972 Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty). We have been told that the international situation has radically changed over the past three decades: there are new missile threats and there is a need to amend the ABM Treaty accordingly. The situation has indeed changed, but not so much as to warrant the dismantling of the existing system of strategic stability through the emasculation of the ABM Treaty. Measures can be taken to counteract the spread of missiles and missile technologies without exceeding the limits of the ABM Treaty; this can be done, first and foremost, through political and diplomatic means. The intensive dialogue between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea on the missile question is a clear example of this. At the multilateral level, there has been a lively discussion of ways to improve political and legal mechanisms for preventing the spread of missiles, and work is proceeding on a new code of conduct in this area and on the creation of a global missile and missile technology non-proliferation control system.

For those countries that raise the question of a military-technical "safety net", we again propose broad cooperation within the framework of the ABM Treaty in the area of theatre ABM systems. The technological groundwork for this has already been done. One aspect of such cooperation could be the Moscow Centre for the Exchange of Information on Missile Launches, which is currently being set up by the Russian Federation and the United States and which should subsequently be open to all interested countries. We have already invited European and other representatives to join in this effort. I hope that the new leaders of the United States will have no objection to use of the Centre in the interests of strengthening regional and global stability.

At the same time, the Russian Federation is prepared to continue without a pause the dialogue begun more than a year ago with the United States on ABM issues on which we have diverging views. The obligation to consider all questions relating to the ABM Treaty is contained in the 1972 Treaty itself. We are, accordingly, open to continuing such discussions in the Standing Consultative Commission - a forum for negotiations that has been operating successfully since 1973 in accordance with the Treaty - having agreed to raise, when necessary, the level of representation of the parties in the Commission.

The implementation of the Russian Federation's proposed pragmatic and timely programme in the field of real nuclear disarmament will make it possible to strengthen strategic stability and international security on the threshold of the new, twenty-first century.

Kremlin, Moscow, 13 November 2000